



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF LAW

FAMILY LAW

Cases and Materials

Volume I

Brenda Cossman and Carol Rogerson
Faculty of Law
University of Toronto

2011-2012

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**FAMILY LAW
TABLE OF CONTENTS
Volume I**

Page No.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE FAMILY AND FAMILY LAW

A. The Family: Definitions and Demographics

Excerpts from Statutes and International Documents	1
Margrit Eichler, "Beyond the Monolithic Bias in Family Literature," <i>Families in Canada Today</i> (Toronto: Gage, 1983) at 3	2
Vanier Institute of the Family, "Definitions of Family," <i>Profiling Canada's Families</i> (1994) at 10-11	5
Vanier Institute of the Family, <i>Profiling Canada's Families IV</i> (2010) at xi-xiii, 2-3, 26-27, 40-41, 44-45, 62-63, 72-73, 78-81 [extracts on changing family structure]	6
Vanier Institute of the Family, "Greater Ethnic and Racial Diversity," <i>Profiling Canada's Families IV</i> (2010) at 14	15
"Vanier Institute of the Family, "Family Violence," <i>Profiling Canada's Families IV</i> (2010) at 164	16
Krista Foss, "Men as likely to face abuse from partner, Statscan says," <i>The Globe and Mail</i> , 27 June 2002	16

B. Recent Challenges to the Family

<i>Canada (Attorney General) v. Mossop</i> , [1993] 1 S.C.R. 554.....	18
<i>Egan v. Canada</i> , [1995] 2 S.C.R. 513	25

C. Legal Regulation of the Family

<i>Balfour v. Balfour</i> , [1919] 2 K.B. 571 (C.A.).....	28
F. Olsen, "The Family and The Market: A Study of Ideology and Legal Reform" (1983), <i>Harvard L.Rev.</i> 1497.....	29
John Eekelaar, <i>Family Law and Social Policy</i> , 2d ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984) at 15-26.....	31
Mary Ann Glendon, <i>Abortion and Divorce in Western Law</i> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) at 7-9 [extract on the educative purpose of law].....	36

II. MARRIAGE AND NULLITY

A. The Significance of Marriage

(a) The Social Context of Marriage

Vanier Institute of the Family, <i>Profiling Canada's Families IV</i> (2010) at 32-41 [extracts on marriage and conjugal unions].....	38
---	----

(b) The Shifting Legal Significance of Marriage

Sir William Blackstone, <i>Commentaries on the Laws of England</i>	46
William Cobbett, <i>Advice to Young Men and (incidentally) to Young Women</i> (1837).....	46
Law Reform Commission of Canada, <i>Bigamy</i> (1985) at 3	46

<i>Hyde v. Hyde</i> (1886), 1 L.R. (P & D) 130	47
<i>Graham v. Graham</i> , 33 F. Supp. 936 (1940).....	47
Shelagh Day, “The Charter and Family Law” in Elisabeth Sloss, ed., <i>Family Law in Canada: New Directions</i> (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1985) 27 at 28-30.....	49
Mary Ann Glendon, “The New Marriage and the New Property” in J. Eekelaar and S. Katz, eds., <i>Marriage and Cohabitation in Contemporary Societies</i> (Toronto: Butterworths, 1978) at 59-70	50

B. Unmarried Cohabitation

Note: Terminology.....	57
Statistics Canada, “Family Portrait ... 2006”.....	58
“Then They Won’t Get Married” Siri Argell, <i>Globe and Mail</i> , Sept. 13, 2007.....	62
“The New Traditionalists” Leah McLaren, <i>Globe and Mail</i> , June 14, 2003	63
Anne-Marie Ambert, “Cohabitation and Marriage: How are they Related?” (Vanier Institute of the Family, Sept. 2005).....	67
W. Holland, “Cohabitation and Marriage—A Meeting at the Crossroads?” (1990-1991) 7 <i>C.F.L.Q.</i> 33	73
<i>Miron v. Trudel</i> [1995] 2 S.C.R. 418; 124 D.L.R. (4 th) 693	76
<i>Molodowich v. Penttinen</i> (1980), 17 R.F.L. (2d) 376 (Ont. Dist. Ct.)	80
Note: <i>Macmillan-Dekker v. Dekker</i> (2000), 10 R.F.L. (5 th) 352 (Ont. S.C.J.)	84
Note: <i>Campbell v. Szoke</i> (2003), 45 R.F.L. (5 th) 261 (Ont. S.C.J.)	85
“Ontario’s Divisional Court to rule on whether mistress might win spousal support”, <i>Lawyers Weekly</i> , Nov. 1, 2002	85
Note: <i>Stephen v. Stawecki</i> (2006), 32 R.F.L. (6 th) 282 (Ont. C.A.).....	87
<i>M. v. H.</i> , [1999] 2 S.C.R. 3	88
Note: Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on the Rights and Responsibilities of Cohabitants under the Family Law Act</i> (1993).....	103
Note: The Legislative Response to <i>M. v. H.</i>	104
<i>Nova Scotia (Attorney General) v. Walsh</i> , [2002] 2 S.C.R. 325	105
Note: Legal Recognition of Unmarried Couples in Quebec.....	121
“No support for common-law spouses discriminatory: QCA”, <i>Lawyers Weekly</i> , November 26, 2020.....	122
Note: Legal Recognition and Regulation of Non-Conjugal Personal Relationships.....	123
“Single Judge Seeks Benefits of Couples”, <i>National Post</i> , Sept. 22, 2004.....	123
“Challenging Couple-ism”, Editorial, <i>National Post</i> , Sept. 23, 2004	124
Note: Australia’s <i>Domestic Relationships Act</i>	125
Note: Alberta’s <i>Adult Interdependent Relationships Act</i> (2003).....	126
Law Commission of Canada, <i>Beyond Conjugal: Recognizing and Supporting Close Personal Adult Relationships</i> (2001) at xi-xix	129

C. Validity of Marriage

(a) Overview

H. R. Hahlo, <i>Nullity of Marriage in Canada</i> (1979) at 1-5	133
Berend Hovius, Note on Validity of Marriage,	133
Peter Hogg, <i>Constitutional Law of Canada</i> (1985) at 533-534.....	135

(b) Opposite Sexes

Note: Same Sex Marriage and the Alternate Legal Mechanisms for Recognition	
--	--

of Same Sex Relationships	136
<i>Halpern v. Canada (A.G.)</i> (2003), 225 D.L.R.(4 th) 529 (Ont. C.A.)	138
Note: The Same-Sex Marriage Reference	149
<i>Reference re Same-Sex Marriage</i> , [2004] 3 S.C.R. 698 [extract on rights of religious officials]	150
Note: The <i>Civil Marriage Act</i> (2005)	150
Note: Same Sex Marriage and Religious Freedom	151
Dan Shoudice, "Refusal to Perform Same-Sex Marriage Costs Sask. Marriage Commissioner \$2500" (Centre for Constitutional Studies, July 27, 2009)	152
<i>Saskatchewan (Marriage Act, Marriage Commissioners) (Re)</i> , 2011 SKCA 3	153
Note: Foreign Recognition of Canadian Same Sex Marriages	161
"Couple test British court on gay marriage," <i>Globe and Mail</i> , Aug. 17, 2005	161
"Gay marriage gone wrong creates Catch-22" <i>Toronto Star</i> , Sept. 23, 2009	162
Note: Same-Sex Marriage Developments in the United States	163
(c) Capacity to Consummate	
<i>Gajamugan v. Gajamugan</i> (1979), 10 R.F.L. (2d) 280 (Ont. S.C.)	166
<i>Dashevsky v. Dashevsky</i> (1973), 13 R.F.L. 1 (Ont. S.C.)	167
<i>Norman v. Norman</i> (1979), 9 R.F.L. (2d) 235 (Ont. U.F.C.)	170
"Judge refuses to annul unconsummated marriage" (re <i>Falk v. Falk</i>), <i>Lawyers Weekly</i> , Oct. 1, 1999	171
Note: <i>L. (K.H.) v. L. (G.Q.)</i> (2003), 231 D.L.R. (4 th) 677 (B.C.C.A.)	172
(d) Monogamy	
Law Reform Commission of Canada, <i>Bigamy</i> (1985) at 3	188
Note: Bigamous and Polygamous Relationships	189
<i>Criminal Code</i> , ss. 290, 291, 293	174
Note: Treatment of Polygamous Marriage in Report of Australia Law Reform Commission, <i>Multiculturalism and the Law</i> (1992)	175
"Polygamous spouses covered under B.C. family legislation, judge holds" <i>Lawyer's Weekly</i> , 1 November 1991	177
Note: The B.C. <i>Polygamy Reference</i>	178
"B.C. Supreme Court opens debate on polygamy," <i>Vancouver Sun</i> , Nov 20, 2010	178
"Ban polygamy now or never" <i>Vancouver Sun</i> , Mar 30, 2011	181
"Few disagree that polygamy can cause harm," <i>Vancouver Sun</i> , April 1, 2011	182
"If Canada's polygamy law is struck, the next step is up to Parliament," <i>Vancouver Sun</i> , April 4, 2011	183
"Future of Canada's polygamy law rests in hands of chief justice," <i>Vancouver Sun</i> , April 16, 2011	184
Elizabeth Abbot, "Big Love or Big Lie?," <i>National Post</i> , June 7, 2011	184
Tom Flanagan, "The Biological and Philosophical Reasons why we should Prosecute Polygamy," <i>Globe and Mail</i> , April 24, 2008	187
Susan Drummond, "A Marriage of Fear and Xenophobia: Our Criminalization of Polygamy isn't about Protecting Women", <i>Globe and Mail</i> , April 6, 2009	188
(e) Age Requirements for a Valid Marriage	
Note	190
(f) Prohibited Degrees of Consanguinity and Affinity	
Note	190

“Incest: an age-old taboo”, BBC News, March 12, 2007	192
“Court annuls marriage between twins separated at birth”, <i>The Guardian</i> , Jan. 12, 2008	193
(g) Consent as a Requirement for a Valid Marriage	183
Note.....	194
(i) Duress	
Note: <i>Scott v. Sebright</i> (1886), 12 P.D. 21; <i>Cooper v. Crane</i> , [1891] P. 369; <i>Buckland v. Buckland</i> , [1967] 2 All E.R. 300	194
<i>S.(A.) v. S.(A.)</i> (1988), 15 R.F.L. (3d) 433 (Ont. U.F.C.)	196
Note on Arranged Marriages: <i>Parihar v. Bhattie</i> (1980), 17 R.F.L. (2d) 289; <i>Singh</i> <i>v. Singh</i> (unreported, Ont. U. Fam. Ct., 13 June 1980)	200
Bruce Ziff, “Recent Developments in Marriage and Divorce” (1986) 18 <i>Ottawa</i> <i>Law Review</i> 121 at 133-134 [extract on arranged marriages]	201
Note: The U.K. <i>Forced Marriage Act</i> (2007).....	201
(ii) Limited Purpose Marriage (Immigration Marriages)	
<i>Asser v. Permohamed</i> (1984), 40 R.F.L. (2d) 299 (Ont. H.C.)	202
Note: <i>Singla v. Singla</i> (1985), 46 R.F.L. (2d) 235 (N.S.S.C.).....	204
Note: <i>Salimi v. Torfehnejad</i> (2006), 32 R.F.L. (6 th) 115 (Ont. S.C.J.)	205
“Fraud squads chase down marriages of convenience” <i>Globe and Mail</i> , May 28, 2008.....	206
“Wife jailed for sham marriage” CBC News, Oct. 1, 2004.....	207
“Spouses can sue each other for tortuous deceit”, Cristin Schmitz, <i>Lawyers</i> <i>Weekly</i> , April 7, 2006	208

III. DIVORCE

A. The Social Context of Divorce

Vanier Institute of the Family, <i>Profiling Canada's Families IV</i> (2010) at 44-47, 50-51, 64-66 [extracts on divorce and remarriage].....	210
Ann Marie Ambert, “Divorce: Facts, Figures, and Consequences” (Vanier Institute of the Family, revised 2009).....	216
Julien D. Payne, “The Dichotomy between Family Law and Family Crises on Marriage Breakdown” (1989), 20 <i>R.G.D.</i> 109.....	231

B. Reform of Divorce Law

(a) The Movement to No-Fault Divorce

H. R. Hahlo, “The Changing Face of Marriage and Divorce” in R.S. Abella and C. L’Heureux-Dubé, eds., <i>Family Law: Dimensions of Justice</i> (1983)	233
Note on history of divorce legislation in Canada	236
Dept. Of Justice, <i>Evaluation of the Divorce Act, Phase II: Monitoring and</i> <i>Evaluation</i> (May, 1990) at 1-9.....	236

(b) Critiques of No-Fault Divorce

Lenore J. Weitzman, <i>The Divorce Revolution</i> (1985) at 362	240
Marygold Melli, “Constructing a Social Problem: The Post-Divorce Plight of Women and Children” [1986] <i>American Bar Foundation Research Journal</i>	

759 at 770-771	243
Note: Other Critiques of No-Fault Divorce	244
“Putting the ‘fault’ back in no-fault divorce” <i>Globe and Mail</i> , 15 March 1988	246
“Spousal misconduct returns to divorce?” <i>Lawyer’s Weekly</i> , 25 March 1988	247
Note: <i>Valenti v. Valenti</i> (1996), 21 R.F.L. (4th) 246 (Ont. Gen. Div.)	249
“Victim is sued for support”, <i>Toronto Star</i> , Jan. 23, 2001	250

C. Obtaining a Divorce under the *Divorce Act*, 1985

(a) Grounds for Divorce

(i) Living Separate and Apart

<i>Rushton v. Rushton</i> (1968), 66 W.W.R. 764, 2 D.L.R. (3d) 25 (B.C.S.C.)	251
<i>Dupere v. Dupere</i> (1974), 19 R.F.L. 270, 9 N.B.R. (2d) 554 (Q.B.)	251
<i>Calvert v. Calvert</i> (1997), 32 O.R. 281 (Ont. Gen. Div.)	253
Note: Relevance of Date of Separation for Property Division	254
Note: Alternative to Separation as a “No-Fault” Ground for Divorce	254

(ii) Adultery

“Wisconsin woman to stand trial on rarely used adultery charge”

<i>The Globe and Mail</i> , 1 May 1990	255
Mary Ann Glendon, <i>The Transformation of Family Law</i> (1989) at 286-287	256
Note: Social Acceptance of Adultery	257
Note: Definition of Adultery	257
<i>P. (S.E.) v. P. (D.D.)</i> (2005), 259 D.L.R. (4 th) 358 (B.C.S.C.)	257
“Wife wants divorce for virtual adultery”, Ananova, 2005	263
Note: Proof of Adultery	263
<i>Burbage v. Burbage</i> (1985), 46 R.F.L. (2d) 33 (Ont. H.C.J.) at 36-38	263
Note: <i>d’Entremont v. d’Entremont</i> (1992), 44 R.F.L. (3d) 224 (N.S.C.A.)	264

(iii) Cruelty

Note : <i>Chouinard v. Chouinard</i> (1969), 10 D.L.R. (3d) 263 (N.B.C.A.)	264
<i>Austin v. Austin</i> (1970), 2 R.F.L. 136, 73 W.W.R. 289, (Sask. C.A.)	265
<i>Gilbert v. Gilbert</i> (1980), 18 R.F.L. (2d) 240, 39 N.S.R. (2d) 241 (T.D.)	266
<i>B.(Y.) v. B.(J.)</i> (1989), 20 R.F.L. (3d) 154 (Alta. Q.B.)	269
<i>J.G.S. v. W.O.J.S.</i> , 2004 BCSC 749	271

(b) Duties and Bars to Proceedings

(i) Condonation, Connivance, Collusion

Introductory Note	272
Christine Davies, <i>Family Law in Canada</i> (1986) at 417-437	273
Note: <i>Guglielmo v. Mikhail</i> (Que. S.C., March 1991)	276

(ii) Inadequate Provision for Child Support

Note	277
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(iii) Religious Bars

“Family Lawyers Get Change” <i>Law Times</i> , 1990	277
<i>Bruker v. Marcovitz</i> , [2007] 3 S.C.R. 607	278

but a glimpse of a fleeting moment. For some of the very factors that give our present social organization a *quasi*-feudal look, are also elements of instability within it.

For example, I have noted our increasing dependence on wage labor and certain changes in the bonding of the employment relationship which can be characterized as involving an increase in job security. But this security, a mere creation of law, could be wiped out by a severe economic crisis. A second troublesome factor that prevents any simple generalization is that for many individuals (women and racial and ethnic minorities in particular) *access* to the preferred forms of new property (good jobs and work-related benefits) is limited. For some, this means their relationship to government and government benefits, a less desirable form of new property, assumes paramount importance. For others, it means they depend on family relationships which seem to be becoming increasingly fragile. Finally, although heightened dependency on work and lowered dependency on family relationships have had certain effects on the law some of which I have sketched, we can only speculate as to what long range *social* effects there will be from a situation where individuals are increasingly dependent on work, yet where work dissatisfaction seems widespread. What are we to make of the curious apparent exchange of values through which legal norms governing the workplace are increasingly particularistic and personalized, looking toward the continuation of the relationship with adjustments on both sides; while legal norms pertaining to the family are increasingly universalistic and neutral, facilitating 'discharge' and 'replacement' when 'performance' does not come up to standards or expectations?

I am far from having reached a conclusion in my own thinking and research on the matters discussed here....

B. UNMARRIED COHABITATION

Note: Terminology

There is frequently some confusion regarding the use of the terms "common law marriage" and "common law relationship". The terms are often used interchangeably and many people speak of a common law relationship as though it were the same as a legal marriage. In fact, a common law marriage, or a marriage valid by common law, differs from a common law relationship both in its formation and in the rights and obligations which attach to it.

In Ontario, a common law *relationship* arises by force of law on a statute-by-statute basis, and is typically based on a period of cohabitation. For example, for the purpose of support rights under the Ontario *Family Law Act*, parties are deemed to be in a common law relationship when they have cohabited continuously for at least three years or if they are parents to a child and have cohabited in a relationship of "some permanence". However, many statutes, both federal and provincial, conferring public benefits adopt a definition of common law relationship which requires that the parties have cohabited continuously for one year or are parents to a child in a relationship of some permanence. Parties to a common law relationship (often referred to as common law spouses or common law partners) do not automatically have the same rights and responsibilities as married couples; in certain circumstances the law has simply decided to treat them in the same way as married couples. A common law spouse may withdraw, unmarried, from the relationship at any time. Because there has been no marriage, no divorce is required to dissolve the relationship.

In contrast, a common law *marriage* results from a ceremony which lacks the legal formalities of compliance with statutory requirements and in which the parties verbally agree to take each other as husband and wife. The common law recognizes such marriages in circumstances where compliance with the statutory formalities is impossible, such as, for example, situations of war. In contrast to a common law relationship, a common law marriage is treated as a legal marriage for all purposes, and thus, a common law marriage may be dissolved

only by way of divorce. In *Keddie v. Currie* (1991), 60 B.C.L.R. (2d) 1, the British Columbia Court of Appeal considered the law concerning common law marriages in some detail. The Court held that common law marriages could not, in general, be entered into in British Columbia because the British Columbia *Marriage Act* specifically provided for the formal requirements of marriage and the circumstances would be rare where a couple wishing to marry was unable to comply with the statutory requirements.

Statistics Canada, *Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006*

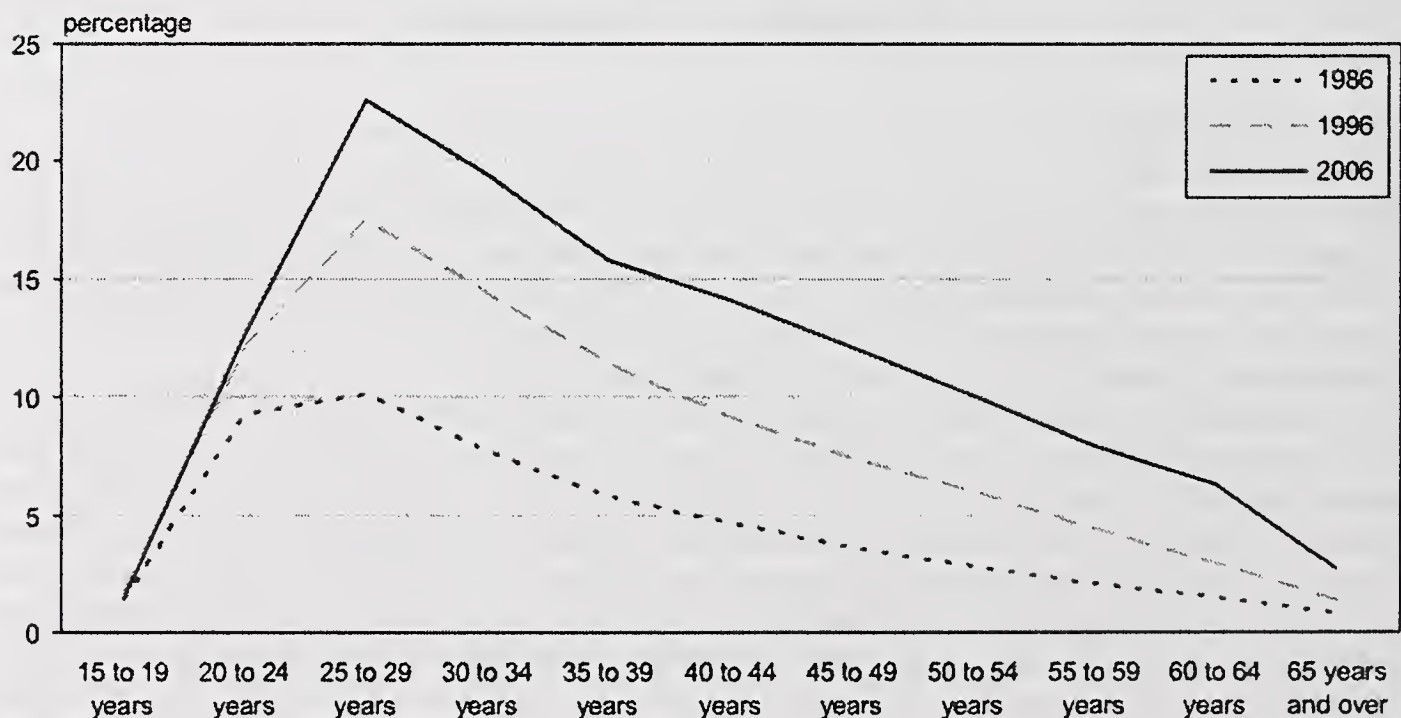
(Ottawa: Statistics Canada, September, 2007, Catalogue no. 97-553-XIE) at 20-22, 24 – 25, 35-36

Living as part of a common-law couple growing rapidly, especially for older age groups

Common-law unions have increased in popularity over the past 25 years in Canada. The census enumerated 2.8 million persons aged 15 and over who lived in a common-law union in 2006. They represented 10.8% of the population, up from 9.7% in 2001.

Common-law unions were most prevalent among young adults and they were most popular among individuals aged 25 to 29. About 22.6% of people in this age group were in a common-law union in 2006, up from 20.6% five years earlier.

Figure 8 Persons in common-law couples increasing for all age groups



Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1986, 1996 and 2006.

The increase in common-law relationships suggests greater social acceptance of this family structure, as well as a desire to be part of a couple, but perhaps with fewer perceived emotional or financial obligations than those generally associated with marriage.

Although common-law unions were more predominant among the young, in recent years older age groups have experienced the most rapid growth. Gains have been especially fast during the past five years among people in their forties and over. The number of individuals aged 60 to 64 in common-law unions rose 77.1% between 2001 and 2006, the fastest pace of all age groups.